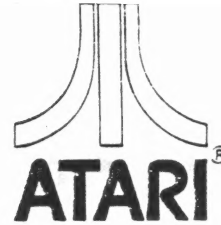


Computer Division



Atari Incorporated
1265 Borregas Avenue
PO Box 427
Sunnyvale California 94086
408 745 2000

Welcome!

Starting an ATARI Computer Users' Group may be work, at first, but we're sure you'll find it worthwhile! The enclosed information is intended to make organizing a little easier. If you have questions we haven't covered, or suggestions to make, please let us know. We want to support you in getting together with other ATARI computer users.

When your group is meeting and has about five members, let us know your group's name, the name of your president, your group's mailing address, and a telephone contact number. We will send you additional materials to help your group grow.

In the meantime, we wish you good luck and offer our support.

Thanks for helping us bring the computer age home!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Earl Rice'.

Earl Rice
Users' Group Support Manager

HOW TO START AN

ATARI^R COMPUTER

/
USERS' GROUP

DRAFT 1

Thank you for your interest in sharing your enthusiasm for your ATARI personal computer. Whether you are new to personal computing or an old timer, we want you to know that we at Atari, Inc. are interested in helping you get the most out of your computer. It's our strong belief that the most effective way to do that is to support the efforts of people like you who are interested in learning and sharing what they know.

Rather than form a giant company owned users' organization, Atari, Inc. has established a Users' Group Support Program. The idea behind the program is to provide you with the information you need to organize your own successful users' group. That way you are free to explore the world of personal computing from your own perspective rather than from the homogenized perspective of an overall organization.

This package is designed to help you get started and get in touch with other groups. When your group has formed, let us know at Atari, Inc., and we will send a technical information package for your group's library.

The Users' Group Support Program address is:

Atari, Inc.
Computer Users' Support Program
1196 Borregas Avenue
Sunnyvale, California 94086

Our phone number is:

(408) 745-5278

You should also feel free to write or call if you have special needs or suggestions.

Be sure to let us know your group's address and telephone contact number as soon as possible. That way we can let you know about future support packages as soon as they are available.

In the meantime, good luck getting started!

WHAT IS A COMPUTER USERS' GROUP?

A Computer Users' Group is an organization of people who own or have access to a particular brand of computer or software. An ATARI (TM) Computer Users' Group, for example, concerns itself with computers and programs from Atari, Inc., as well as products of other companies which would be compatible with ATARI computers. Whatever banner a group of computer users fly, their purpose is to share information about the computer they use.

HOW DO USERS' GROUPS GET STARTED?

People like you start users' groups. The key ingredients for a successful group are:

- 1: Five or more people who want to share information about their computers.
- 2: Two or more people willing to get things started.

Everything else you need, including expertise will materialize if you keep your group together for a few months.

DO WE NEED ONE?

If you find yourself pondering the products in your local computer store, wondering if they will do what you want, you need a users' group. If your friends are calling you asking things like "How do I use the COLOR command?", or "Do you have an assembly routine to...?", or "Do you remember how to...?", then you need a users' group!

A good rule of thumb is this: If there are ten ATARI Computer owners within a twenty mile radius (make that fifty miles in rural areas) you probably have at least five candidates for a quarterly meeting. Five people who meet for an hour or two every three months can comprise a perfectly respectable group. If your local computer owners want more contact with each other, they will probably say so.

HOW DO WE START ONE?

It's fairly easy to start a group. All you have to do is:

- 1: Make contact with other computer users.
- 2: If there is no group in your area, announce your intention to start one.
- 3: Hold a first meeting.
- 4: Keep on meeting regularly.

MAKING CONTACT

Talk to your local ATARI computer dealer first. There may already be an ATARI Computer Users' Group in your area. If so, sign up and join the fun! If the closest group is too far away for your schedule or gas budget, it's time to start another one! Contact the nearest existing group and see if anyone there would like to join you, or knows of others who might. If there is not yet a group of ATARI computer owners in your area, you will need to develop your own contacts.

Check again with your ATARI computer dealer. Other people may have inquired about a group. Some dealers may hesitate to give out customers' names directly, but they will probably be willing to mail out a notice for you if you prepare it and pay the postage. Your dealer may have a bulletin board where you can post a notice, as well.

PLACES TO MAKE CONTACT

LOCAL SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

COMPUTER SHOPS

ENGINEERING COMPANIES

SHOPPING CENTERS

PUBLIC BUILDINGS

NEWSPAPERS

ATARI, INC.

Personal computing enthusiasts are turning up everywhere so there is no limit to the number of appropriate places to announce your group. Most local schools and colleges have a newspaper, bulletin board, or public address system that can carry your message. Be sure to invite both students and teachers to join your group. Businesses, where large scale data processing is going on, often have employees who own personal computers. Contact the personnel director and ask to have your announcement circulated. Companies with engineering departments are likely to have computer hobbyists among their ranks. Post notices on bulletin boards at your local library, supermarket, and bank. Remember your local radio and TV station's public service announcements. Finally, use your local newspapers and neighborhood advertisers. The formation of your group is certainly worth an ad, and perhaps even a public service announcement or local interest item. You can also write to Atari, Inc. directly for the names of existing groups around the country as well as the names of people who have written in asking about a group in your area. Write to:

Atari, Inc.
Computer Users' Support Program
1196 Borregas Avenue
Sunnyvale, California 94086

YOUR FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

There are at least two schools of thought about the early stages of forming a group. One advocates staying small while you get organized and then inviting those interested to join you. Ask a few people you already know, or who your dealer may know, and wait to invite the whole community. That may be a good idea if you know there are hundreds of ATARI computer users in your area.

The other school of thought is more ambitious. Publicize your meeting as widely as possible right from the beginning. If a big crowd turns out, getting organized might take a little longer, but at least you won't have to guess what the needs are in your area. This is a good plan if there are only a few potential members in your area since you will want to contact as many of them as possible. Remember, to get started, you need to assemble that critical mass of about five people.

Be sure to include the following information in all your announcements:

A NEW GROUP is forming for those owning, using, or interested in
ATARI 400(TM) or 800(TM) PERSONAL COMPUTERS.

FIRST MEETING: Date

TIME: Time

LOCATION: Address of the meeting.

Also add a statement such as:

ANYONE INTERESTED PLEASE DROP BY.

Or perhaps:

This will be an ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING. Please come if you are interested in being an officer or core worker in the group. A general meeting will be announced as soon as we are organized. If you want to know about future meetings and activities, please send your name and address to:

Your name

Your address

Add your phone number only if you don't mind talking to people at any hour of the day or night.

A mailing address is important so that people can find out more about you right away.

Remember, in the beginning, someone has to organize and get things started. If you don't really care to continue as an officer in the group, there will probably be others at the first meeting who would take over if you ask. Getting started is the important thing. The group's name, address, and officers can be chosen later.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

There are no set rules about what your group can and can't do. Most groups do some or all of the following:

- HOLD MEETINGS
- PRESENT SPEAKERS
- ANSWER MEMBERS' QUESTIONS
- SHOW OFF MEMBERS' PROJECTS
- OFFER COURSES
- MAINTAIN A SOFTWARE LIBRARY
- PUBLISH A NEWSLETTER
- EVALUATE PRODUCTS
- ARRANGE GROUP PURCHASES AND DISCOUNTS
- PARTICIPATE IN COMPUTER CONFERENCES

MEETINGS

Most groups have regular meetings. Meetings can range from formal lectures on hardware or software to loosely moderated free-for-all discussions. If your group has a mixture of beginners and experts, you will want to have presentations on different levels. Whatever your group's level of computer savvy, it's important to keep your meetings active, interesting, and fun. For many members, attending meetings will be their major form of participation, so you must be sure it's a rewarding experience for them. You may want to provide space for more active members to bring their computers for individual "show and tell" sessions. That way, the more involved and excited members can help inspire the less active ones.

BUSINESS MEETINGS

If your group has any organization at all, you will need to hold business meetings. These meetings are generally less fun than most general meetings and should be held only when necessary. Business meetings which actually have nothing to accomplish are boring and will eventually drive members away. Let your officers be responsible for general administration and have business meetings to accomplish specific ends.

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Your first general meeting should be ACTIVE. Do not, under any circumstances, have a business meeting for your first general meeting! Half the people who show up will go home yawning and never return! Most of your membership will just have come from work where they have spent all day at business of some sort. They want something INTERESTING! If you need to feel organized and official before you have your first general meeting, have an organizational meeting first to get a core group started, and THEN have a general meeting.

At your first meeting, you need to show your potential membership what value is to be had in forming an active group. Here, demonstration is the most convincing form of proof. Bring an interesting representative from your local ATARI computer dealer or Area Representative. Perhaps someone from a nearby existing group can come and demonstrate software from their library or show an interesting project. You could invite a manufacturer to demonstrate an interesting peripheral device, such as a voice synthesizer.

The first important thing is to present something to stimulate the imagination. Sharing what you know and hope for, whether practical or fanciful, is what the group is about. Get that idea across at your first meeting, and you're bound to succeed!

The other important thing to do at your first meeting, is to find out what interests the people in your area. You may find strong common interests from the beginning. You may also find a wide and challenging range of interests to support. Whatever the personality of your group, help it to emerge early by showing interest in the ideas of all those who show up.

PRESENTING SPEAKERS

Getting interesting people to come talk to your group can be a valuable part of your activities. A speaker doesn't have to be well-known or a heavyweight figure in the computer world. In fact, some of the technical biggies are horribly boring to listen to. What really counts is having someone who has something useful to present and who cares enough to want your group to be interested. It can be far more valuable to have a pleasant local dealer explain how to program sound, or what to look for when you buy a computer stand, than to have to sleep through a boring lecture on the implementation of parsing algorithms using the GARGANTUA 3900 computer. Make sure your speakers are relevant to your group and interested in your people. If your members are excited about telecommunications, a demonstration of your local database network would be interesting. It would be FANTASTIC if the demonstration were done using your favorite computer!

Find out what excites your group, find out who provides it, and then get them to come talk to you about it. If you find yourself staring out the window or trimming your nails as they talk, learn what you can and make the presentation yourself. If you have fun, you've got yourself a speaker!

Be sure to be gracious enough to take care of your speaker's transportation expenses and to minimize the inconvenience of visiting you. Of course, if your guest is representing a manufacturer, the company may be taking care of all that. Unless you clearly know that your guest will be traveling on an expense account, however, make the offer. That way you will avoid embarrassing misunderstandings. Your group will also gain a reputation for hospitality and you will find future speakers more willing to visit you.

ANSWERING MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Sometimes people who would be excellent group officers don't volunteer because they feel unsure about answering the technical questions members may have. While some of your members will have joined your group specifically to learn, that learning need not come directly from you just because you started the group. Share what you know. Then find out who knows the rest and get them to share it. The important thing is getting questions answered, not who provides the answer. This is a great place for the more technical members of your group to contribute! It's also why guest speakers are so wonderful! Everyone has something to contribute. Find out what it is and get them to share it. You will know you are a successful organizer when your group begins finding its own answers.

SHOWING OFF MEMBERS' PROJECTS

Some of your members may be quite accomplished, technically. Having them show the projects they develop to the rest of the group can be fun and educational. This is one of the ways a group begins to answer its own technical questions, through the experience of its members. A good presentation of an exciting project can uncover a potential instructor in your midst. You will also find that meetings will be more interesting when there is something to learn.

OFFERING COURSES

Sometimes a formal presentation is the best way to get something complex across. For example, while it's true that some people learn BASIC on their own, the complex process of programming is best taught methodically and thoroughly. When several of your members are interested in the same technical subject, a classroom presentation is definitely in order.

If you are fortunate enough to have someone in the group who knows the subject, is interesting to listen to, and organized enough to teach, you've got it made! If you don't have this wonderful person in your group, it's time to go hunting.

Sometimes, just the course you need will be offered locally. If it's free, go over as a group and sign up. If it's not free, go over as a group and ask for a discount. It never hurts to ask! If the course isn't available, or costs too much, try your local ATARI dealer. Dealers will often know where you might find a course, or materials for one, in your area. They can also check with their area representative from Atari, Inc.

Remember the Users' Group Community. There are literally dozens of ATARI Computer Users' Groups around. Most of them have had to learn the same things you will need to learn. Some have prepared training materials for their members and are happy to share what they know. The groups around the country as well as those in other countries are very supportive of one another and will be as supportive of you once you get in touch with them.

If you have reached the point of looking around for materials, you probably need an instructor, too. Once again, look for someone interesting. A dull presentation won't teach much. Find someone who is interested in the people being taught as well as in the subject!

There is, of course, the possibility that you will have to teach the course yourself. Just in case, here are some things to remember:

1: LEARN THE MATERIAL YOURSELF FIRST. This sounds obvious, but people have attempted to teach things they were unfamiliar with. If you are going to teach your members to use a word processor, for example, be sure you have used it enough to answer questions accurately.

2: HAVE ENOUGH MEETINGS TO PRESENT THE SUBJECT CLEARLY. If it takes fifteen meetings to cover a subject, use that many. Avoid trying to cram a complex subject into a single meeting.

3: PRESENT CONCEPTS CONCISELY. Break your subject into smaller parts. No single idea should take more than about ten minutes to present. Have your class use the concept immediately. If that involves use of the computer, have people bring their computers! For example, explain what the PRINT statement does, then have them execute it both directly and as a program statement. Then be sure everyone understood before going on to the next thing.

4: BE SURE PEOPLE'S QUESTIONS GET ANSWERED. An unanswered question is distracting. Make it comfortable for people to ask questions and be sure each one is answered. If you don't know the answer, it's important to say so and that you will find out. Make sure you follow through by getting the answer.

Remember that you're just sharing what you know with your friends, and you'll find teaching easier than you thought it would be.

YOUR SOFTWARE LIBRARY

As your group's members become more familiar with their computers, many will begin writing their own programs. When enough members have enough programs to share, you will probably want to put together a library of your group's most useful programs. You may want to exchange them among yourselves and with other groups. When that happens, you will need to look at some serious questions. They are:

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

WHO OWNS IT?

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IT?

HOW DO WE DISTRIBUTE IT?

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Your library should only contain software which has been knowingly contributed by the author. An unauthorized copy of copyrighted software can get your group into a great deal of difficulty including legal prosecution. Be sure you know the source of software before including it in your library. Your group should always respect the labors and investment of authors and copyright owners and go to great lengths to protect their interests. It is unjust and harmful to assume permission to copy and distribute someone else's work. **BE SURE YOU HAVE PERMISSION, FROM THE AUTHOR OR COPYRIGHT OWNER, BEFORE COPYING SOFTWARE. GET IT IN WRITING!!!** Once you distribute a piece of uncopyrighted software, it will most likely be considered to be in the public domain and its author will lose rights to it. While users' group software is most appropriately put into the public domain, an individual member may want to protect contributed software for eventual commercial use. Always respect that right!

WHO OWNS IT?

A group's software library is their stock in trade. Your group will be known among other groups by the quality of its library. The software library, membership list, and newsletter are your group's primary assets. The question of ownership is an important one and must be decided early on. Groups have dissolved into a mass of bad feeling because they neglected this question until they were too large. Remember, your group is a club for people who share a common interest. It's best for your group to remain simple and non-commercial.

The easiest thing to do is to specifically put all the contents of your library into public domain and share it freely. You can't prevent anyone else from copying it, but if your group is not commercially motivated, that isn't a problem. This approach answers the question of ownership by saying "Nobody owns it!"

Another approach is to consider the library to be property of the Group under its official name. You may want to copyright your library and attempt to control its distribution. While this idea is appealing to some groups, you should consider some of its implications.

If your group owns copyrights, it must have a way of distributing that ownership if it dissolves. It must also have a way of distributing or accounting for any income it might get from that ownership. The very process of getting and enforcing copyright is far from simple. You should consult an attorney for advice on obtaining a copyright on software and how to protect it. Copyright enforcement can generate hard feelings among other, less commercial, groups. Software vendors are occasionally taken to task in users' group newsletters because they enforce their copyrights. Consider carefully before taking this approach.

You might also elect to consider the library software to be owned by the person who wrote it. In this case, the copyright status of the software is up to the owner. If it is copyrighted, the owner gives permission, in writing, for each copy made.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IT?

If you are going to have a library, someone will need to be sure it is maintained. This involves deciding what to include, how to document it, how to distribute it, and keeping track of what it all costs. The job of librarian can be difficult for a large or prolific group. It's important to have a capable and organized person as librarian. It's also a good idea to have an assistant librarian to help out. Whether you elect or appoint your librarian, it's a good idea to limit the librarian's obligation to six months or so. They can always volunteer again if they want, but they may need a break. It can be a very demanding job.

HOW DO WE DISTRIBUTE IT?

While your librarian will be responsible for evaluating and distributing your group's software, the answer to "How do we do it?" should be agreed upon by the membership. Some groups give their software to their own members freely while insisting that other groups trade for copies. Other groups will give programs to anyone who pays for the cost of duplication and postage. Still others consider sale of their software to be a fund raising activity and tack on a small profit to the price of their programs.

In any event, it's wise to make sure that the people receiving your programs carry the cost of distributing it. Your librarian will need to monitor the cost of diskettes and cassettes as well as postage to be sure your group doesn't lose money trading software.

An option available to owners of ATARI Personal Computers is the ATARI PROGRAM EXCHANGE. The Exchange accepts user developed software and distributes it through its catalog. The contributor is paid a royalty. Users' Groups can make use of the exchange if they wish. You can get more information about the ATARI PROGRAM EXCHANGE by calling Atari, Inc. Customer Service or writing to the Sunnyvale, California address given earlier.

PUBLISHING A NEWSLETTER

Most users' groups publish a newsletter. It's often the first project a group takes on. Many simply announce group events and report on meetings. Some of the more elaborate ones are complete magazines with articles, ads, letters to the editor and monthly columns. A simple announcement, handwritten and dittoed is adequate for many groups. If your group is feeling ambitious, there are a few points you might consider before entering the publishing business:

1: THERE ARE OTHER WAYS TO COMMUNICATE WITH MEMBERS. The simplest way is to meet at the same time all the time. A permanent posted announcement can let newcomers know about you. A telephone committee can tell people about changes. Also, a postcard can carry meeting information with much less trouble than a newsletter.

2: A NEWSLETTER CAN BE EXPENSIVE. Paper, printing and mailing can eat up your budget or exhaust a sponsor's good will very quickly. Your newsletter will need to make enough money from subscriptions or ads to support itself.

3: NEWSLETTERS TAKE TIME. The slicker it is, the more time it will take. You will need a permanent, dedicated editor and staff to keep it going. Its a lot to ask of volunteers.

4: IF YOU CHARGE FOR IT, YOU MUST DELIVER. If you sell advertising or subscriptions you are taking on a responsibility to keep publishing for a fixed length of time on a fixed schedule. That requires real commitment. Be sure your volunteers are up to it.

5: PUBLISHING REQUIRES STAFFING. You will probably need at least two regulars and as many volunteer extras each month to get it done. Every month you will need to do the following:

- 1: COLLECT ARTICLES
- 2: DO REWRITING
- 3: LAY OUT THE COPY
- 4: PROOFREAD (Every word. Twice)
- 5: GET IT PRINTED
- 6: MAIL ON TIME

You will also have to routinely:

- 1: MAINTAIN YOUR MAILING LIST
- 2: MAINTAIN FINANCIAL BOOKS
- 3: MAINTAIN ADVERTISING RECORDS

There are people who can do all this themselves without burning out, but they are rare. Be sure you have enough staff before taking on a major newsletter effort. It's really not fair to draft the spouse or kids to bail you out if they're not members of your group.

On the bright side:

1: NEWSLETTERS ARE VALUABLE TO YOUR MEMBERS. A well written, informative newsletter is the best advertising your group can have. If it teaches and informs, it will make life with a computer much more fun for your members and it's worth all the trouble.

2: NEWSLETTERS ARE FUN. Of course, you have to like working hard, but the satisfaction in seeing people actually READING it is enormous.

3: SHARING THE LOAD MAKES IT EASIER. You might consider pooling your efforts with another nearby group to put out a joint newsletter. More sources for articles, reviews and ads. More volunteers. It's an idea worth looking at.

Whatever you do, be sure to do it for the fun of it and you can't go wrong.

EVALUATING PRODUCTS

Users' Groups often evaluate hardware and software products and publish the results in their newsletters. There are a few things to be aware of if you plan to do that.

1: YOUR OPINION CARRIES WEIGHT. Your published estimate of a product's worth will encourage or discourage sales. That fact implies a great deal of responsibility. You must be sure, before publishing an evaluation, that you know what you are talking about. An evaluation based on a misunderstanding can unjustly harm an honest manufacturer, particularly if they are small or new.

2: YOUR EVALUATION LAYS YOUR GROUP'S REPUTATION ON THE LINE.

If your evaluations are incomplete, inaccurate, biased, or flawed in any way, your group will gain a reputation as irresponsible and ill informed. If people buy products because you like them, and then they don't work, they will remember where they got the bum information. Likewise, if they miss the deal of the year because you said it wasn't so hot, they'll remember. When you evaluate products, you have two reputations at stake; the vendor's and yours. Respect both and you will be all right.

Evaluating the things available for your computer is one of the legitimate and most valuable functions of a users' group. Most reputable manufacturers take these evaluations to heart and consider them in new product design. If you don't like a product, it's courteous to let a manufacturer know your opinion before you publish it. That gives you as well as them the chance to be sure you didn't have a defective unit or a misunderstanding of the product. Of course, if it is simply not a good product, your review will say so, but at least the vendor will have gotten a fair hearing.

Remember that while you can review a manufacturer's product, reviewing the manufacturer can cause legal problems such as a lawsuit for defamation. It's unnecessary to make disparaging remarks about a vendor. Their products will speak for them.

When reviewing products, remember:

BE ACCURATE

BE FAIR

BE CAREFUL

ARRANGE GROUP PURCHASES AND DISCOUNTS

Most manufacturers, and many retailers, base the price of products on the volume ordered. If enough people in your group use cassette tapes, or diskettes, or anything else to warrant case lot purchases, you can save money. You may even qualify for discounts on hardware purchases if you get enough buyers together. You may need to go in with other groups to have enough volume for discounts on expensive items such as printers. If you know something is popular, get in touch with other groups and see how many buyers you have. Then contact the manufacturer and see how they handle volume buys. You may find reasonable savings in doing so. You might look into a group maintenance agreement with a local service center. Once again, it doesn't hurt to ask.

PARTICIPATING IN COMPUTER CONFERENCES

Several times a year, in various cities around the country, the computer industry gathers for expositions and conferences. The conference organizers are generally open to local group participation. Sometimes a fair organizer is willing to donate unused small booth spaces to local users' groups provided the group doesn't engage in any commercial activity. Just as often, they will rent booth space at a discount to clubs and users' groups. It's also possible to find a sponsor who will pay for booth space for your group or for several groups to share.

Show off your projects. Let people play games with your computers. Give some kind of presentation. Enjoy the show!

If a fair isn't nearby, travel and accommodations can put a hefty dent in your budget, so find out what things cost before you go. Eating out can be incredibly expensive when you travel. In some cities, hotel rooms can rent for unbelievable prices. If a

show is large, participating manufacturers' bookings can fill almost every available room. Be sure to plan two or three months in advance if you plan to attend any major fair.

There are also smaller computer fairs several times a year. Occasionally, users' groups put on expositions with the aid of local dealers and manufacturers' representatives. These shows draw much smaller crowds than the giant manufacturers' conferences, but they can be even more fun because they can be more casual and leisurely.

Public presentations like these are a lot of work, a lot of fun, and are a great way to get your group known. You will also be bringing an awareness of personal computing to new people.

THE USERS' GROUP COMMUNITY

As a group, you will find yourself involved with other groups and organizations. The community composed of computer users, manufacturers and sellers is highly interdependent. If the manufacturers didn't build the computers, the dealers couldn't sell them to us and most of us would still be wishing for them. If we didn't buy computers, manufacturers and dealers wouldn't be able to make a living in the business. They would all have other kinds of jobs, and some of them would be wishing there was a market for their wonderful computer idea. If the dealers didn't exist, manufacturers would have a hard time marketing an economical number of computers, and we would have to pay a lot more for them if we could get them at all. This doesn't even take into account all the tape, ribbon, paper, wire, plastic, programming and publication it takes to keep the whole operation going. Our interest in computers puts us on top of a very high technology heap, and guarantees that we are intimately connected to thousands of people whether we realize it or not.

Very few of those thousands of people are out to rip anyone off. There are software pirates here and there, some of them quite bold, and there are a few hardware charlatans in the woods, but by and large, these amount to only a few thieves among us, and every community has a few or the unenlightened selfish.

Personal computers are an avocation for most of us, and our participation in users' groups is for our own personal satisfaction. It would be a shame to drag the conflicts and greeds of our workdays into our private lives. It's best to pay fairly for what we get, buy only from those who deliver value for price, and steal from no one. This is perhaps an old fashioned outlook for a high tech bunch, but it keeps things clean.

The biggies to watch out for are:

PIRACY

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

MANNERS

PIRACY

Piracy is theft by copying and distributing copyrighted software without authorization. It's no secret that virtually every major piece of personal computing software has been copied and can be bought underground. The price of pirated software is generally less than the retail price of the same program bought legitimately. A program stolen from a company before it reaches the retailer, however, can sell for quite a bit more than the eventual retail price. Sometimes the Pirate may not sell the software directly, but may simply trade it or give to friends. In any event, the effect is the same. While the software pirate can afford to give away the program or exploit a lower priced market because it cost nothing to steal,

its author loses a legitimate living. A software author has to be willing and able to live on savings, or income from another job, in order to get that first program onto the market. In the case of a company, it has to be able to pay programmer's salaries while they develop the program. Also the salaries of the people who write the documentation to go with it. This can be a large investment of time, money and personal commitment.

The theft and distribution of a new software package can actually drive a small software house out of business. It can also make a larger company less willing to make the investment required to deliver truly high quality software. The overall result is to punish those who take care to produce excellent work and encourage those who produce quick and dirty software.

As mentioned before, we are an interdependent community. What damages a part of that community impairs all of it.

Another practical consideration: When you buy programs from a reliable software house, you are going to get the support you need to use what you have bought. Customer service lines, errata updates, revision notices and the like cost money. The pirate can't give those things to you. When you support people, you are entitled to be supported; you can demand and get that support from an honest manufacturer. A thief can only sell you what has been stolen, then you're on your own. I've never heard of a pirate operation with a users' group support program.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

An area similar in effect to piracy is conflict of interest. This comes about when someone is put on both sides of a temptation at once. The dealer who is a group president can have this problem. The service center technician who belongs to a users' group is a target. The staff programmer who is a group librarian is a prime candidate.

Whenever your job interests and the demands of your group can come into conflict, you must look carefully at your choices because others will. At least one service center technician has lost a job for giving special deals to group members and letting the employer unwittingly foot the bill. Always make sure that the efforts and contributions of your members are theirs personally to give. Be sure people are compensated fairly for what your groups get and that ALL contributions are acknowledged to the people they came from as well as the member who brought them. In case of any doubt, invoke an integrity formula: If anyone is damaged or slighted by a course of action, don't do it. Remember that we depend on one another.

MANNERS

Manners might seem an odd topic to cover in a booklet like this, but it follows from what you've just read. Treating other groups, dealers and vendors with consideration keeps things light and enjoyable. Rivalries, snubs or just plain insensitivity can change an enjoyable group into a monthly trial.

If you have a computer fair for your community, invite the other groups in your area to participate too. If your beloved manufacturer is coming to talk, invite all the owners and other groups you can. It will be more fun and no one will feel left out. If another group in your area is having trouble, run over to help out, don't swoop in for the kill. When you visit the factory where your computer was born, be nice. After all, the people who were hospitable enough to see you took time away from their responsibilities to do so.

Treat others' feelings and well being as though they were your own and you will have a fantastically popular and successful group. You will also have a lot of fun, and that's the whole point.